

## “FEMININE CONDITIONS OF JOUISSANCE”



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There are feminine conditions of jouissance, if only that of the Proustian homosexual, Mademoiselle Vinteuil, who could only experience jouissance [*jouir*] with her partner in front of the portrait of her dead father (who was thereby ridiculed)—a condition that Ernest Jones encountered in his clinical work and that Lacan defined as “the fantasy of man, the invisible witness.”<sup>1</sup> Psychoanalysis, which for structural reasons cannot tell us much about women’s “supplementary jouissance,” tells us more about the ways a neurotic woman experiences jouissance with a man, and why the phallic function and castration are, in theory, required. When it comes to conditions of jouissance, each woman certainly has her own, and it would be futile to try to classify them or undertake an inventory—that would amount to treating women the way zoology treats a species: as a totality.

Having encountered it repeatedly in clinical experience, I confine my attention here to the figure of the “castrated lover” or “dead man” (*Écrits*, 733/95), which Lacan, in his 1958 text, “Guiding Remarks for a Convention on Feminine Sexuality,” understands as a nonanatomical condition of the kind of jouissance that has been trivially and falsely called vaginal (*ibid.*, 727/89). I examine the part of this text devoted to “Frigidity and Subjective Structure” in relation to “The Taboo of Virginity,” where Freud discusses frigidity.<sup>2</sup>

### IMMATURE SEXUALITY

In his text, Freud examines the fear of deflowering virgins among “primitives.” He is quite categorical about the fact that this fear is not a masculine fantasy but is, rather, based on a real danger. What proves it to him is his analysis of modern women. He begins from the following paradox: the sexual act, and not

only the first one, which should tie a woman to a man and inspire tenderness and recognition, even sexual “bondage,” instead sometimes inspires frigidity—a frigidity that is enigmatic when the man is not impotent. There is nevertheless a phenomenologically “contradictory” case that allows Freud to resolve the paradox and the enigma. The case is that of a woman whom he was “able to submit to a thorough analysis,” in which her own hostility, going as far as insults and blows, served as the conclusion of the “great satisfaction” she experienced during the sexual act with her beloved husband (SE XI, 201). In this way, frigidity is clarified by its apparent opposite—“the greatest jouissance”—a situation that the Lacan of Seminar XX would not disavow, for there he sees frigidity as a problem that is less physical than epistemic: a woman can experience jouissance—here that of the Other—without knowing it. Freud infers its existence from a hostile feminine impulse that expresses itself either in such a way that it is “united [with jouissance] to produce an inhibiting effect” (ibid., 202), going as far as frigidity, or in a way that is separated from jouissance by the staging of murder or castration fantasies that follow jouissance, fantasies that might even be acted upon.

What then is the etiology of this feminine hostility? Let us dispense with the anthropological and psychological explanations that Freud considers inessential. His conclusion is as follows: responsibility for the paradoxical reaction to satisfaction or frigidity must be attributed to penis envy, linked to a woman’s pathological stasis at the virile phase. As Freud says, “a woman’s *immature sexuality* [*die unfertige Sexualität*] is discharged on to the man” (ibid., 206) out of bitterness and especially vengeance, hence, the obvious interest in marrying a widow, who is perhaps inoffensive.

### FRIGIDITY AND SUBJECTIVE STRUCTURE

Freed from the notion of development that hindered Freud, Lacan takes an entirely different approach in 1958.<sup>3</sup> He does not stress feminine envy and hostility, which certainly exist, but rather the conditions of possibility for a woman to recognize a man as such, and to experience jouissance with his penis. Lacan’s theoretical reference for this is symbolic castration, but it remains to be seen how it comes into play in the feminine unconscious and how it intervenes in sexual jouissance. Indeed, it is almost as if, responding to Freud’s comment that a widow would perhaps be “no longer dangerous” (SE XI, 206), Lacan had said, “Yes, I would say that only widows experience jouissance. . . . Your patient does not experience jouissance in spite of her castrating fantasies but rather thanks to them, except that her pantomime proves that they are not sufficiently symbolized.” The Freudian opposition between feminine satisfaction and castration fantasies is resolved here in a causal relationship.

In “Guiding Remarks,” Lacan clarifies what he put forward the same year in “The Signification of the Phallus.” Frigidity was defined there as “a lack of satisfaction of sexual needs,” and it was assumed to be “relatively well tolerated”

(*Écrits*, 694/290) because of the convergence of feminine love and desire on the same object. Lacan now answers three questions:

1. How can we "mobilize" and gain access to frigidity?
2. What are the causes of frigidity?
3. Under what conditions can a woman experience sexual jouissance and therefore not be frigid?

Lacan infers the answer to the first and second questions from the answer to the third.

#### THE "FETISHISTIC FORM OF LOVE"

##### CHARACTERISTIC OF MEN

Lacan begins by defining the fetishistic form of masculine love in order to distinguish it from the erotomaniacal form of feminine love. The masculine subject loves his partner "inasmuch as the phallic signifier clearly constitutes her as giving in love what she does not have" (*Écrits*, 695/290). However, he desires "beyond" his partner, in a *Venusberg* where "phallus-girls" proliferate (ibid., 733/94). The phallus that thus makes the latter desirable depends, in the subject's unconscious, on the mother's desire that formerly acquired phallic signification due to the paternal metaphor. He desires them therefore *quoad matrem*, that is, qua mother (Seminar XX, 36/35), hence, the divergence between love and desire in relation to the object, a divergence treated by Freud as a debasement in the sphere of love.<sup>4</sup> If one can speak of the "fetishistic form of love" (*Écrits*, 733/94) in men, it is in the sense that the phallic brilliance that issues from this "beyond" of the loved partner reflects on her as a phallic veil, masking the unbearable character of castration. This is what makes him desire her nonetheless and enjoy her. At this stage in his teaching, Lacan does not yet situate object *a* as the cause of desire in this dialectic. The "centrifugal tendency of the genital drive in the sphere of love" (ibid., 695/290) results from the splitting of love and desire in men.

#### THE "EROTOMANIACAL FORM OF LOVE"

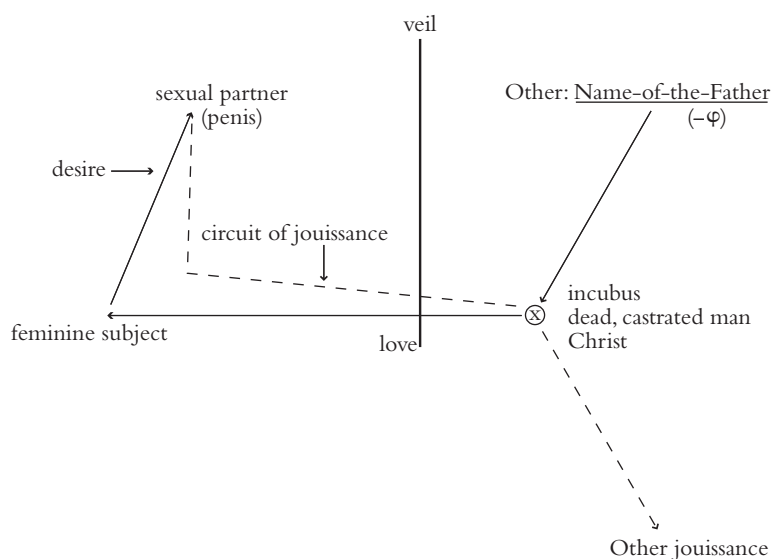
##### CHARACTERISTIC OF WOMEN

For women, on the contrary, there is an apparent convergence of love and desire onto one and the same object. Indeed, a woman finds the signifier of her desire in her partner's organ which, being endowed with this signifying function, "takes on the value of a fetish" (*Écrits*, 694/290). She also can choose the same man as the "Other involved in Love," who is "deprived of what he gives" (ibid., 695/290). However, already in "Signification of the Phallus," Lacan noted that this Other is "difficult to see." In the section on frigidity, he therefore specifies its structure as that which "hides behind the veil" (ibid., 733/95) and establishes how this apparent unity masks a real "duplicity of the subject" (ibid., 734/95) that cannot be reduced to the conservation of the

Oedipal link to the father. Recall that Freud says that a girl can enter “the Oedipus situation as though into a haven of refuge” (SE XXII, 129) and never leave her father.

The following schema will guide my reading of Lacan’s construction of a kind of fantasy that links the feminine subject, through a “going and coming” [*aller-retour*] (I justify this expression on the basis of Lacan’s section title “Frigidity and Subjective Structure”), to the Other, the Other of the unconscious.

FIGURE 4.1



is only from where the dear woman is whole, in other words, from the place from which man sees her, that the dear woman can have an unconscious” (90/98–99). But as a subject, it is because of her defense—masquerade—that she can maintain a veil between herself as subject and the Other. The Other here is thus the Other of the unconscious, the locus of the law, and what “brings symbolic castration into play” (*Écrits*, 732/93). Lacan bases himself here on the axiom that “there is no virility that castration does not consecrate” (ibid., 733/95), which anticipates the formulas of sexuation for men (Seminar XX, 73/78). There is no “whole man” ( $\forall x\Phi x$ ) without the law of castration made possible by the father as an exception ( $\exists x\overline{\Phi x}$ ). According to this axiom, a woman can only recognize the virility of her partner by marking it with symbolic castration. But unlike Freud, Lacan does not localize this castration in a more or less staged castrating fantasy; on the contrary, he localizes it in the fem-

inine unconscious and in connection to love. If, therefore, feminine desire aims at the sexual partner in front of the veil, it is from a point "behind the veil" (*Écrits*, 733/95) that her love is called forth in the erotomaniacal form that presupposes that the initiative comes from the Other. Here it is an entirely Other partner who calls "her adoration to it," "a castrated lover or a dead man (or the two in one)" (ibid.), collected under the term *ideal incubus*. An incubus is a demon who visits women in the middle of the night, in a nightmare; this also is the literal meaning of the Latin *incubare*, which reminds us of the un-wished for dimension, beyond the pleasure principle, of jouissance.

Note the central place of symbolic castration in Lacan's elegant construction here. Behind the equivocal figure of the incubus, is it not in fact the Name-of-the-Father that we find in the "locus beyond the maternal semblable from which the threat came to [the woman] of a castration that does not really concern her" (ibid.). And should we not seek the secret of this incubus in the dead father, who is both the guardian of jouissance and the principle of castration?<sup>5</sup> The imaginary representation of the "dead man" or the "castrated lover" takes on its symbolic and real weight by emanating from the point at which the law is enunciated.

The fact that feminine jouissance has the virile organ as a condition lies then in a return of love to desire in a circuit of jouissance that begins from the point behind the veil and ends at the desired organ: "Thus it is because of this ideal incubus that an embrace-like receptivity must be displaced in a sheath-like sensitivity onto the penis" (ibid.). Lacan, who in section V of "Guiding Remarks" rejects the anatomical theories of so-called vaginal jouissance, succeeds here in locating jouissance not in the feminine body but rather in the surrealist trajectory in which we have followed it, from the incubus to the fetishized penis. The importance given to this point behind the veil underlines the clinically undeniable proximity of jouissance to love in women and explains what is, at times, their overestimation of love that can almost be absolute. This is noted by Lacan in the curious "ideal" that he relates to the "incubus." This trajectory illustrates the formulation that Lacan introduces in Seminar X, *Anxiety*: "Only love allows jouissance to condescend to desire" (March 13, 1963).

#### A WOMAN'S "TRUE" PARTNER

Let us focus now on some consequences that Lacan draws from the construction of this point "behind the veil." First of all, his reference to Christ as "a broader instance than the subject's religious allegiance involves" (*Écrits*, 733–34/95) points toward his subsequent work in which the Other jouissance, "beyond the phallus" in S(A/), is viewed as a prop for the existence of God: "... the God face, as based on feminine jouissance" (Seminar XX, 71/77). Léon Bloy's novel, *La femme pauvre*, cited by Lacan in Seminar VIII, *Transference*, also indicates the shift from phallic jouissance related to the figure of Christ, the dead man, to a jouissance in God where Woman would exist. Indeed, the

“duplicity” of the feminine subject in 1958 between love and desire is rewritten by Lacan in the 1970s in terms of a “splitting” [*dédoublement*], with respect to the jouissance of ~~Woman~~ who does not exist, between  $\Phi$  and  $S(A)$ : “Woman has a relation with  $S(A)$ , and it is already in that respect that she is split, that she is not-whole, since she can also have a relation with  $\Phi$ ” (Seminar XX, 75/81). If she wants to have a sexual partner, she must accept this relation to the phallic function,  $\Phi$ , on the basis of which she has an unconscious that makes her a “divided subject,”  $\$$ , and has a fantasy ( $\$ \diamond a$ ) that allows her, if she is lucky, to meet a “man who speaks to her according to her fundamental fantasy.”<sup>6</sup>  $S(A)$ , the signifier of the lack in the Other, is that by which she makes up for the sexual relationship that does not exist: it is her relationship to the Other, a “supplementary” jouissance, that is experienced without her knowing how to speak it. The difficulty here is to line up the following nonoverlapping sets of terms: the “duplicity” between love and desire; the “splitting” of jouissance between  $\Phi$  and  $S(A)$ ; and the “division” of the subject of the unconscious. If desire, for example, is to be situated on the side of  $\Phi$ , love can be distributed between  $\Phi$  and  $S(A)$ , as the mystics prove. We will return later to the “division” of the subject and the “splitting” of the not-whole when we turn to hysteria.

With his 1958 formulation, Lacan explains other points as well. First the claim that “the duplicity of the subject is masked in women, all the more so in that the partner’s servitude makes him especially apt to represent the victim of castration” (*Écrits*, 734/95), shows the danger for the sexual partner of wanting to be everything for a woman, or of having all of her for himself. Thus the *maladroit* man<sup>7</sup> who tries to play the part of the Other is ineluctably pushed—by she who Lacan refers to in “L’Étourdit” as his “over half” [*surmoitié*]<sup>8</sup>—into the place of the dead or castrated man.

Next we can deduce the “true reason why the demand that the Other be faithful takes on its particular character in women” (*ibid.*). We might have thought that it was in order to keep her partner’s penis for herself alone, but what is far more important is to have exclusive rights to that which in him reevokes for her the point of adoration “behind the veil,” from whence she loves and enjoys: that is her “true” partner. Later Lacan takes up this “demand that the Other be faithful” with another formulation: “[I]t is as his one and only that she wants to be recognized by him” (“L’Étourdit,” 23). This “one and only” also refers to feminine jouissance insofar as, like in Ovid’s account of the myth of Tiresias, that jouissance exceeds what man experiences in coitus.<sup>9</sup>

Lastly, “the fact that she justifies this demand all the more readily with the supposed argument of her own faithfulness” (*Écrits*, 734/95) results from the subjective structure deployed by Lacan. A woman is in fact fundamentally unfaithful to her partner, however unique he may be, since she cheats on him with the ideal incubus harbored in her own unconscious. This is literally repre-

sented in the film *Dracula* by Francis Ford Coppola, in which we see what happens when the partner is abandoned for the ideal incubus.

#### FRIGIDITY AS AN OBSTACLE

Let us turn now to the second question raised in this section of "Guiding Remarks": frigidity—its nature, its causes, and its modalities.

Frigidity is not necessarily a symptom, that is, the subject does not always complain about it. According to Lacan in "Signification of the Phallus," it often is "relatively well-tolerated" because of the apparent convergence of love and desire on the same object. In Seminar XX (69/74), he calls into question the very existence of frigidity, noting instead a jouissance that is experienced by a woman with her partner without her knowing it, and that is therefore in the register of the Other jouissance, a jouissance that cannot be said. But Lacan obviously does not refer to it as an "extra" jouissance in section VIII of "Guiding Remarks"; there it is understood, on the contrary, as a deficiency of satisfaction. Even apart from the "context of symptoms," it "presupposes the entire unconscious structure that determines neurosis" (*Écrits*, 731/93) and is a "symbolically commanded defense" (*ibid.*, 732/93). The "nature" of frigidity is thus that of a defense by the subject against a jouissance that presents itself, as we saw, at the border between adoration and anxiety. Its final cause is thus a refusal of feminine jouissance, due to the risk it implies of going beyond and submersion for she who experiences it.<sup>10</sup>

The subject's defense against jouissance here must be understood within the "dimension of masquerade" (*ibid.*). Now in 1958 Lacan gives a prominent place to the masquerade, since it is the way a woman lends herself to a man's desire: "[I]t is in order to be the phallus—that is, the signifier of the Other's desire—that a woman rejects an essential part of femininity, namely, all its attributes, in the masquerade" (*ibid.*, 694/290). This masquerade, a feminine seeming [*paraître*] or "para-being" [*par-être*] (Seminar XX, 44/44), metamorphoses a "not-having" (the phallus) into a "being" (the phallus). Like a veil dissimulating the feminine subject's deprivation, the phallic masquerade also provokes a "veiling effect" (*Écrits*, 732/94) with respect to the feminine unconscious as Other.

Once he constructs his subtle dialectic between desire, love, and jouissance, Lacan tells us what acts as an obstacle to it, namely, the material and formal cause of frigidity: "any imaginary identification a woman may have (in her stature as an object offered up to desire) with the phallic standard that props up fantasy" (*ibid.*, 733/95). Hence, a difficulty: a woman must engage in the masquerade, which is phallic by its very nature, in order to be desired by a man, yet, if she alienates herself excessively in it, wanting too much to be a "phallus-girl," she risks losing all of her sexual satisfaction. Are we to understand that by adhering too closely to this phallic para-being, she risks believing herself to

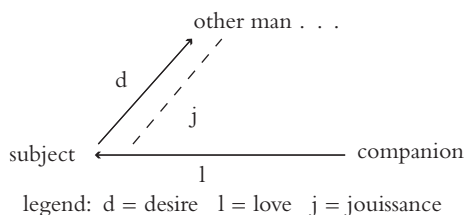
be in it [s'y croire] and imaginarily saturating the lack that it covers over—thus becoming deaf to the call to adore the ideal incubus?

#### MODALITIES OF FRIGIDITY

Let us try to deduce, obviously not exhaustively, the different ways in which one can refuse the dialectic of desire, love, and jouissance, isolating the points at which it can break down. Frigidity is obviously not the necessary consequence of these breaks, since it also requires imaginary identification with the phallus.

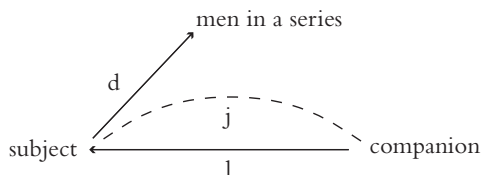
*The Adulterous Woman* The adulterous woman loves and desires, but not the same partner. There are two possible cases. The first resembles the classic form of debasement in the sphere of love in men: in love, she is faithful to her companion, but frigid. She seeks jouissance in liaisons with one or more other men she desires but does not love (see Figure 4.2).

**FIGURE 4.2**



The second is a more enigmatic model also encountered in psychoanalysis: an adulterous woman who loves her companion—it is even only with him that she experiences sexual satisfaction—and yet cannot help desiring other men, one after another. In her relations with these other men, however, she remains frigid (see Figure 4.3).

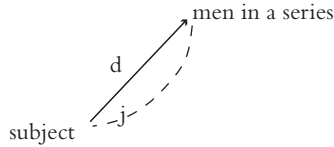
**FIGURE 4.3**



*The Collector of Men* In this case, the woman is desirous but refuses or never feels love. She pursues jouissance with a series of men whom she desires (see Figure 4.4).

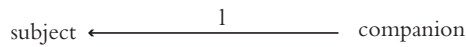


FIGURE 4.4



*The Disgusted Woman* In this case, the woman overestimates love but neither desires nor experiences jouissance (see Figure 4.5). This is a form that one often finds in hysteria, when the penis is refused out of disgust.

FIGURE 4.5



I present here a few elements from the beginning of an analysis that brings to light the "narcissism" that creates an obstacle to the "embrace-like receptivity."

### *The Perfume Bottle*

A young woman came to see me to begin an analysis because of her professional difficulties. Working in the movie industry, she felt "undressed" and "unveiled" in her relations with others, which was unbearable to her. Regarding a symptom that took the form of an obsession [*idée fixe*], she complained, in passing, of frigidity. For some time, she had been waking up at night because her upstairs neighbors made love noisily. At work she was obsessed with noises and interpreted them with her sleepless nights in the back of her mind. This made work difficult, because she was "a sound engineer" and had to edit sounds. The expression she used to characterize her obsession was "the cries of a woman who is coming [*jouit*]." She also told me then that she had been refusing to have sexual relations with her companion, whom she loved but who had begun to lose patience with her. She responded by saying to him, "Tenderness, but nothing more."

Certain elements from childhood allowed her to identify what had sustained her professional "vocation." Up until age five, she lived with her maternal grandparents, across the street from her parents' house. Every evening she hoped her mother would pay her a visit, a visit announced by the sound of her car, but her car did not always stop. Once her mother had left, or gone by without visiting, the child would keep an eye on the window of her parents' bedroom, watching the light go on and then off, the curtains being drawn and reopened, and so on. The cuts of the sound and the image were thus associ-

ated—in the phrase “the cries of a woman who is coming”—with “the sound of her mother,” who comes and goes and perhaps joins the father in the bedroom: a primal scene, therefore, or even a staging of the paternal metaphor.

In another vein, she related the fact that she was disgusted by penises to the fact that she was also disgusted by meat, which was indicative of the desexualization of the organ when not endowed with the phallic signifier. This brought to mind her disgust for her father who, mortally ill at the moment of her puberty, displayed his suffering “in his flesh,” which horrified her. She let her mother care for him. I relate here a sequence of dreams she had around the time of the discovery in analysis of her frigidity.

In the first dream, a man cut another man into pieces in front of her and her mother. The dreamer jumped on him and castrated him. In the second dream, her mother was beside the dead father when the dreamer entered their bedroom, where she had heard noises. These dreams brought out the theme of the castrated man and its link to the figure of the dead father. They highlighted the mother’s ambiguous and baleful role.

After having “tried” a sexual relationship that once again proved to be unsatisfactory, she dreamed that her legs turned into meat, and that her mother cut her ears off. This brought to mind her sick and impotent father. The dream allows us to glimpse the fragmented body of the mirror stage, becoming rotten after being cut up, rather than any phallic signification. The mother here is castrating and prohibiting.

But another sequence brought out her “imaginary identification with the phallus.” Her companion had offered her a bottle of perfume, but instead of appreciating it she was haunted by the idea of breaking it and losing the precious liquid it contained. That reminded her of an earlier dream in which her mother broke one of the daughter’s perfume bottles. Mad with rage, the daughter grabbed one of the mother’s bottles and smashed it on the ground. Alas, the perfume that the second bottle contained turned out to be the daughter’s, the mother having poured the contents of the first bottle into the second before breaking the first. In this way, the woman’s vengeance against her mother turned back against herself; in the end, it was her own fault that she lost the precious perfume.

It appears in this little anecdote that what is important to her is not only the bottle (cf. Dora’s jewel-case, SE VII, 64, 69–70) but also what it contains: the phallic *agalma* constituted by the precious perfume. Thus it is not only the phallic seeming that must be saved, for the inside is even more valuable. Indeed, the patient had fantasies of a closed body that could only be opened through breaking and enter-

ing. In addition to the masquerade and phallic seeming, her very being was identified with the phallus. Even in love she could not accept herself as lacking. To desire's lack, which would imply endowing her partner's penis with the phallic signifier, she preferred to keep this signifier for herself, rendering her invulnerable, even if her dreams showed that she had a little Achilles' heel. The metaphors of her dreams evoked "feminine sexuality [ . . . ] as the effort of a jouissance enveloped in its own contiguity" (*Écrits*, 735/97) and fear mingled with envy of a "symbolic break" that would free her from her precious but weighty phallic ego.

#### THE "TREATMENT" OF FRIGIDITY: "AN UNVEILING OF THE OTHER"

This case will help us interpret Lacan's answer to his third question: How can frigidity be "mobilized"? He means in analysis, of course, somatic treatments being ruled out due to the fact that analysis has nothing to do with anatomy. Any hope of a cure through lovemaking, which would imply that frigidity can be reduced to sexual frustration, would be equally futile ("the usual failure of the dedicated efforts of the most desired partner," *Écrits*, 731/93). How can frigidity be mobilized in analysis, then, and more precisely, "in a transference [ . . . ] that brings symbolic castration into play" (*ibid.*, 732/93)? The goal is to bring about an "unveiling of the Other involved in the transference [that] can modify a symbolically commanded defense" (*ibid.*). Now is not this Other involved in the transference the very Other of love sustained by the subject-supposed-to-know? The analyst attempts, by means of the transference, to get the subject to glimpse that point "behind the veil" that her excessive masquerade masks: the ideal incubus which causes love, though not without anxiety that must be overcome, and which is linked to the Name-of-the-Father and to the origin of the law in the unconscious.

This also reveals that there is a certain implicit analogy here between the feminine position and the analyst's position. Indeed, if the "unveiling of the most hidden signifier, that of the Mysteries, was reserved for women" (*Écrits*, 734/95), it is the analyst who has to unveil for the frigid subject the Other who is the receiver [*receleur*]<sup>11</sup> of feminine jouissance.

#### HYSTERIA AND FEMININITY

In the two texts we have studied by Freud and Lacan, frigidity is understood in terms of the castration complex, albeit in different ways. What is at stake for Freud is *Penisneid* (penis envy or envy of the penis), that is, the very modality of desire as lack, whereas for Lacan it is imaginary identification with the phallus—thus, rather, something that plugs up desire, creating an obstacle to the circuit of jouissance.

Neither of the two speaks of hysteria in the passages we have examined. We could, however, “reconcile” their conceptions of frigidity by noting that the virile phase of the frigid woman in Freud’s thought refers to “playing the part of the man” in hysteria, whereas “final identification with the signifier of desire” (*Écrits*, 627/262)—the phallus—specifies hysteria for the Lacan of the 1960s. This leads us to the distinction between hysteria and femininity.

It would be tempting to draw the dividing line between the man who has to be killed and the man who is already dead, that is, to situate hysteria in terms of the castrating fantasy of the Freudian neurotic and femininity in terms of the woman who welcomes [*reçoit*] the dead or castrated lover. Why not, as long as we do not conclude that there are women on the one side and hysterics on the other—in other words, as long as we realize that, while femininity and hysteria are conceptually distinct, the extensions of these concepts intersect significantly.

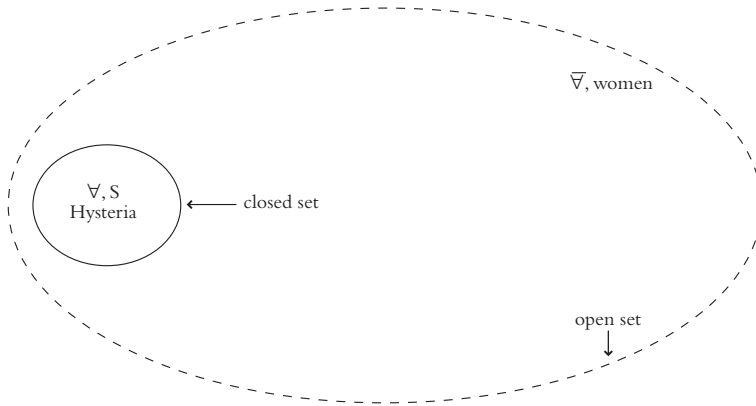
Earlier I enumerated three oppositions or divisions: the duplicity in women between desire and love, the splitting of the not-whole that characterizes her jouissance between  $\Phi$  and  $S(A)$ , and the division of the subject of the unconscious,  $\$$ . Let us begin then with a speaking being who is inscribed under “women” in the formulas of sexuation (Seminar XX, 73/78). That speaking being “grounds itself as being not-whole in situating itself in the phallic function” (*ibid.*, 68/72). If, however, the said woman wants “to be joined with what plays the part of man” (“L’Étourdit,” 23),<sup>12</sup> it is suggested that she use the “shoe horn” of the phallic function (*ibid.*, 21). She would then have a relation—albeit contingent, that is, dependent on her encounters—with the phallic function,  $\Phi$ . She would then also be a subject of the unconscious, divided by the signifier and related to object  $a$  as the cause of desire in accordance with her own fantasy. She would have symptoms and would therefore be neurotic, that is, obsessive or hysteric (but obsession presupposes a hysterical core, according to Freud).

If we consider, on the contrary, that there is an incompatibility between “being a woman” and “being a hysteric,” where, then, are the women? Must they be reduced to several mythical or literary figures? Must we say that they are precisely where the analyst does not meet them? That they are crazy or psychotic? In that case, the analyst would see only men, many of whom have female anatomy. Such a rarity of women would seem clinically unsustainable and would contradict Lacan’s statement: “How can we conceive of the fact that the Other can be, in some sense, that to which half [ . . . ] of all speaking beings refer” (Seminar XX, 75/81)?

I will thus take the position of asserting that hysteria and femininity can coexist in the same woman who is said to have a hysterical structure, and, furthermore, that hysteria is thus always partial, and that a woman goes beyond or exceeds her hysteria. We can sketch this simply by representing a not-whole woman as an open set that excludes its own limit, something Lacan suggests in Seminar XX (15/9). Hysteria can then be represented as a closed “whole,”

containing its own limit, that is situated inside the aforementioned open set: it is the whole constituted by "playing the part of a man" that does not coincide with "being a man" (see Figure 4.6).

FIGURE 4.6



You can expand hysteria within the not-whole (or open set) as much as you like, and you will still have an infinite remainder between the two, between the hysterical limit and the missing boundary of femininity. You will still have a not-whole between the two. This shows that a not-whole cannot be saturated by any whole, indeed, not even by several "wholes." In this sense, the concept of the not-whole, which defines ~~Woman~~ as an indeterminate existence (Seminar XX, 68, 93/72, 102), takes us beyond the metaphor of the hole and the cork that is all too easily used to characterize women.

Nevertheless, the analyst first encounters the hysteric in the closed set and only has "sporadic" (Seminar XX, 75/81) and contingent access to Woman's fundamental relation to the Other in the "infinite" open set that contains the closed set. The analyst must not forget, however, that a not-whole woman's jouissance is related to the Other in such a way that, at any moment, it can give rise to manifestations that are as unpredictable as they are unexpected.

Lacan's work allows us to differentiate and link hysteria and femininity in several respects. With respect to jouissance we can discern, on the one hand, the jouissance tied to hysterical symptoms, especially conversion symptoms, which incarnate the master's castration (Seminar XVII, 99) within a discourse that constitutes a social link—that is the meaning of such symptoms; on the other hand, we can discern a woman's sexual jouissance with a man, that jouissance which, even with phallic mediation, is not inscribed in any discourse. Whereas symptoms are necessary and based on the subject's fundamental fantasy, sexual jouissance is contingent and linked to one or more feminine conditions of jouissance. We have considered one modality of this, the dead or castrated man.

## THREE TYPES OF JOUISSANCE

I now briefly discuss one of the clinical cases that has underpinned this chapter. We can differentiate the loci of three jouissances: hysterical symptoms, sexual jouissance, based here on the figure of the dead man, and the Other jouissance.

Mrs. A. came to see me due to a series of symptoms triggered by her husband's heart problems. She saw him fall, and ever since then she has been falling, twisting her arms and legs, wearing herself out, and becoming spasmodic. In classic style, her symptoms defied medical science, and her doctors eventually encouraged her to see an analyst. During the preliminary meetings, she quickly mentioned a "trauma" that had occurred when she was nine. Her father had had a serious motorcycle accident in front of the house. She can still hear the horrible sound of her father falling. It happened at a crucial moment for her: she could not stand her parents, especially her mother, and she had obtained their permission to go to boarding school. Her father's fall, and his resulting physical and mental deterioration, prevented her much-needed departure. She became slightly depressed and herself fell off her bicycle.

Mrs. A. is the fourth child in her family. Her oldest siblings died young. The first was a sister, who was said to be beautiful and blonde like her mother. The second was a brother, who was supposedly poisoned by his mother's milk. After their death, a third child was born—the spitting image of the dead sister—who was adored by her mother in place of the first. Mrs. A. was born last, unattractive and "swarthy" like her father, the "opposite of a 'top model,'" as she put it. The "top model" was her sister, who shielded her from her mother by attracting the latter's anxiety-ridden mothering. "Very early on," Mrs. A. told me, "I decided to escape my mother's deadly surveillance. I associated myself with the living, like my father."

At the time of her falling symptoms, she described a haunting fear that her husband, her child, or someone else close to her would die. During her sessions, she elaborated on her sad thoughts in detail, alternating them with narratives and fantasies of giving birth. One day, wanting to get her to feel the weight of the fantasy that could be deciphered in her statements and symptoms, which I will characterize as "the living being who falls," I said to her, "But this is terrible, you spend all your time imagining the death of your fellow man." She responded, "No, not all my time, just most of my time, except when I have ecstasies." I asked her about what she called "ecstasies." She explained, essentially, that it was what happened when she was alone in her garden, empty of thoughts and images. Although she was a believer, the ecstasies were not related to God. All she could say was that she experienced them as something unique, different from sexual jouissance. I did not learn any more about them, even though she had seemed to want to speak about them.

Her sexual jouissance had always been intense with her husband, whom she loved and to whom she generally had been faithful. She regretted the recent cessation of their sexual relations following his coronary illness and her

own hysterical pains. As a backdrop to this, she immediately mentioned the distant figure of a lover from before her marriage who died tragically and whose memory still haunted her. She then associated this dead lover with her brother, who died before she was born, telling me, "He was the only man my mother ever cherished."

Not wanting to be her mother's dead son, she had thus chosen to be the "living being who falls" by identifying with her father. But in her relations with her husband, she got off on [*jouissait*] the dead man, who she was not, but who she forever possessed. Behind the figure of the dead lover lurked for her the unnameable point—the son who died a martyr—from which the following order had been given to her: "You will not be the dead son, your mother's fetish object." Here we have the Name-of-the-Father, which names and forbids maternal jouissance.

This case allows us to distinguish the following: (1) the jouissance tied to her hysterical symptoms, sustained by the fantasy of "the living being who falls"; (2) the barely sketched out place of the Other jouissance in the form of her ecstasies; and (3) her sexual jouissance with her husband—but not without the dead man—to which hysteria is an obstacle but which it does not cover over.

The fact that a woman is more than or exceeds her hysteria, and that sexual jouissance must be situated where she is not-whole but not unrelated to the unconscious (Seminar XX, 73/78)<sup>13</sup>—as Lacan's notation (~~Woman~~ → Φ) indicates—is also proven by the different ways analysis ends. We see some duly analyzed women whose hysteria and relation to symbolic castration have been decisively modified. Among these, some continue to experience jouissance on the basis of representations such as those of the dead or castrated lover, representations that have not changed but became conscious at one point due to analysis. Does a hysterical remainder point to a failure of the analysis? It does not, because we have seen that it is not a question of imaginary fantasies that are reducible to the hysterical subject's fundamental fantasy but rather of a direct emanation of the origin of the law in a not-whole woman, the condition of her recognition and enjoyment of a man.

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## NOTES

1. See Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, trans. C.K.S. Mongrief (New York: Random House, 1934), p. 210; E. Jones, "The Early Development of Female Sexuality," *Papers on Psychoanalysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961); J. Lacan, "Guiding Remarks for a Convention on Feminine Sexuality," *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne*, trans. J. Rose (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1982), p. 97 (735). Hereafter, all references to "Guiding Remarks" and other texts from Lacan's *Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966) will simply be indicated in the text as *Écrits*, followed first by the French page number and then by the page number in the corresponding English translation: either

*Feminine Sexuality* or *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1977). All translations have been modified, often significantly, to reflect the new forthcoming translation of *Écrits* by Bruce Fink.

2. Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vols., trans. J. Strachey (London: Hogarth Press), vol. XI, "The Taboo of Virginity," pp. 193–208. Hereafter, all references to the *Standard Edition* will be provided in the text as SE, followed by the volume and page numbers.

3. "Guiding Remarks," section VIII, "Frigidity and Subjective Structure," *Écrits*, 731/93. Lacan disengaged himself from Freud's developmental approach, particularly in section VI of the same text ("The Imaginary Complex and Questions of Development"), where he constructs the "sexual metaphor" (*Écrits*, 730/91), which substitutes the subject's "not-being" for its "not-having," symbolized from then on by the phallus. On this basis, he concludes: "This remark assigns a limit to questions about development, requiring that they be subordinated to a fundamental synchrony" (730/91). This can be noted as follows:

$$\frac{-\varphi}{\text{development}}$$

4. See Freud's "On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love," SE XI, 179–90.

5. Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre XVII, L'envers de la psychanalyse* (1969–1970), ed. J.-A. Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1991), p. 143.

6. Lacan, "D'Écolage" (March 11, 1980), *Annuaire et textes statutaires* (Paris: ECF, 1982), p. 87.

7. Cf. "Les solitudes," Philippe La Sagna, Fall Meeting of the ECF, 1992, with a commentary by Carmen Gallano in the *Lettre Mensuelle* of the ECF, no. 114, 5 "Maladroit!"

8. Lacan, "L'Étourdit," *Scilicet* 4 (1973): 25. The translation given here, "over half," plays off the expression "better half."

9. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. E. V. Rieu (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 147.

10. See J.-A. Miller, "L'homologue de Malaga," *La Cause freudienne* 26 (1994): 7–16.

11. A *receleur* is a receiver of stolen goods, also known as a "fence."

12. The French here, "se conjoindre à ce qui fait homme," is rather more complicated, since it indicates a neologism, *thomme*, which includes *homme* (man) and evokes Thomas d'Aquin (Saint Thomas Aquinas).

13. In this sense, we must not confuse the concept of the "not-whole" with that of S( $\bar{A}$ )—they are not isomorphic. A woman is not-whole, even in her relation to the phallus, as Lacan shows in the first class of Seminar XX. Lacan takes up the not-whole there, in its relation to man, in terms of what he calls the hypothesis of "compactness" (Seminar XX, 14/9) for sexual *jouissance*. He illustrates it by the "feminine myth of Don Juan" (*ibid.* 15/10), which concerns the not-whole in relation to man, a relation contaminated by the Other, without it being a question there either of supplementary *jouissance* or of the hysteric's relation to the other woman.